
The European Union's response to the earthquake and nuclear plant situation in Japan [Update: 25 March]

Reference: MEMO/11/195 Date: 25/03/2011

HTML: [EN](#)

PDF: [EN](#)

DOC: [EN](#)

MEMO/11/195

Brussels, 25 March 2011

The European Union's response to the earthquake and nuclear plant situation in Japan [Update: 25 March]

Since the devastating earthquake which struck Japan on Friday 11 March, the European Union is fully mobilised to translate its solidarity into concrete support.

The European Union civil protection assistance

The EU has mobilised itself to provide coordinated assistance and ensure the prompt delivery of any help needed.

17 European states, members of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, have offered in-kind or financial assistance to help Japan's substantial relief operation. A shipment of European aid was dispatched to Tokyo on 23 March, when a European flight delivered 70 tons of relief items, including blankets, mattresses and sleeping bags.

On 24 March, the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, International Cooperation and Crisis Response Kristalina Georgieva travelled to Japan to oversee the delivery of Europe's assistance and to discuss the civil protection effort with the Japanese authorities and partner organisations working to help the affected population.

A European Civil Protection team, including experts in transport, logistics and radiological matters, has been deployed on the ground since 18 March. The team coordinates the reception and onward transport of European assistance, and its hand-over to partners in Japan. The team also works with the Japanese authorities to identify further needs. The European Civil Protection Mechanism is ready to coordinate the provision of further aid, if requested by Japan, including tents, mattresses, blankets and jerry-cans, water tanks and pumps, food items and financial assistance.

Situation in Japan's nuclear plants

The European Commission is getting information from the International Atomic Energy Agency on the situation in Japan on a regular basis.

To assess the Japanese situation and the EU's state of preparedness in case of similar incidents, Commissioner Günther Oettinger called an ad-hoc coordination meeting on 15 March, with all 27 national nuclear safety authorities and all operators and vendors of nuclear power plants in the EU. Commissioner Günther Oettinger gave first hand information to the European Parliament on 15 March evening.

In the extraordinary EU Energy Council meeting on 21 March, there was a large consensus that the European Commission should prepare stress tests together with Member States and national regulators. These would be voluntary tests based on common standards.

Which are the EU and Member States respective competences for nuclear safety?

With the EU Directive on Nuclear Safety (2009/71/Euratom), the EU has established a legal framework for the safety of nuclear power plants. It says that Member States shall provide for national rules, the licence of nuclear power plants and safety supervision. This means that national safety authorities undertake inspections of the nuclear power plants and check whether contingency plans and safety standards are in place. Member States have to set up and continuously improve national safety rules. The Directive makes the safety standards of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) partially legally binding and enforceable in the EU.

Health aspects

The potential impact of events on the health of EU citizens is constantly monitored.

Under chairmanship of the European Commission, Member States exchange information and consult each other in the Health Security Committee (HSC) – and, in particular, the section dedicated to chemical, biological and radio-nuclear threats.

Within this network, the Commission is following the measures and actions taken by the Member States in relation to travel advice and messages to citizens.

The Commission will continue to monitor the situation from a health perspective in the framework of the Health Security Committee.

The Commission is also liaising with the World Health Organization which is fully involved in the handling of the situation

More information:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/preparedness_response/cbrn_threats/index_en.htm

<http://www.who.int/hac/crises/jpn/faqs/en/index.html>

Safety of products imported from Japan

On 15 March, the European Commission launched a notification via the RASFF (Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed) recommending to analyse products from Japan for radioactivity. This concerned feed and food from plant (e.g. tea, sea-weeds) and animal (fishery) products imported from 15 March onwards.

In order to further limit possible risks to the safety of its food chain, the EU decided yesterday (24 March) to reinforce controls on imports of food and feed from certain regions of Japan. All products from the regions most affected by the situation will have to be tested before leaving Japan and will be subject to random testing in the EU. Feed and food from the other regions from Japan will be randomly tested upon arrival in the EU. [See [IP/11/362](#)]

The monitoring and checking of imports are the responsibility of Member States which have to inform other Member States in case a contaminated product is found.

According to the legislation in place, customs in each Member State should ensure that the goods imported are free from radiation and should actively exchange information on the type of measures taken (for instance on how they measure radiation level with a container of food products) and the results. A risk profile has been introduced in the EU Customs Risk Management System.

Imports to the EU of Japanese agricultural products (i.e. products of animal origin, fish and of plant products) are relatively small. In 2010, the total value of agricultural products imported to the EU from Japan is estimated at €187 million for agricultural products and €18 million for fishery products.

Diplomatic action

The EU Delegation in Tokyo has remained in continuous and active contact with the Japanese authorities. It is playing an active role in monitoring all aspects of the evolving situation around the clock. The Delegation is also helping to coordinate the activities of EU member states' diplomatic missions in Japan, who have set up a network to facilitate information flow and to ensure prompt and efficient response to the needs arising.

Member States' embassies and consular offices in Japan are operating, in close coordination with the EU Delegation in Tokyo. Citizens are invited to contact their embassies and to follow the Japanese authorities' advice.

Many Member States are advising against travel to Japan and in particular to the most affected areas of the country.